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Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Bonfanti, Maria Irene
Citation	Bonfanti, Maria Irene. "Amedeo Modigliani's Reclining Nude (1919): A Case-study of the Temporalities and Geographies of the Return to Order". BA Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2019.
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Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/294



John Cabot University

Department of Art History

Bachelor of Arts in Art History
Minor in Business Administration

Amedeo Modigliani's *Reclining Nude* (1919):
A Case-study of the Temporalities and Geographies of the Return to Order

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Fall 2019

Abstract

In 1930, at the Venice Biennale, Amedeo Modigliani was exhibited for the second time. The works on display resumed his art career: there were drawings and sculptures; portraits, and nudes. They all shared the trace of Modigliani's interest in the art of the Trecento and of the Italian Renaissance, as well as his avant-garde intentions without ever being part of any specific school. His works were replete with elegant bodies and suggestive deformations such as almond-shaped eyes and elongated necks. Those very features that from 1917 until 1930 had divided critics, both in France and Italy. Only in 1930 did critics recognize Modigliani's style as a valid solution for the so-called Return to order. *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on one Arm* is useful as a case-study to understand the shift in the critical reception of Modigliani's work and the different temporalities and ideological contexts on either side of the Alps. The thesis begins with an analysis of the 1917 exhibition at the Berthe Weil Gallery in Paris and follows with a critique of the 1922 Biennale exhibition in Rome. The thesis concludes with a study of the 1930 Biennale in Venice that represents a turning point in Modigliani's reception and informs our understanding of the inter-war period.

Moreover, the thesis attempts to explain historiographical trends in art criticism by analyzing the tendencies in and reasons for the Return to order in Italy and France. In other words, to study this specific work by Modigliani, *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on one Arm* allows to understand a radical change in the critics' appreciation of this singular artists and his contribution to modern art. However, what scholars have failed to recognize is Modigliani's appropriation of Trecento and Renaissance art, as well as the formal innovations interpreted from other avant-gardes – in particular Cubism, which provides reasons for the impossibility of identifying Modigliani with any specific movement of the 20th century.

Dedication

A mia mamma,

che mi ha insegnato ad avere costanza, credere in me, e non mollare mai.

A mio papà,

che mi ha trasmesso l'amore per l'arte.

A mia sorella,

che ha sempre creduto in me.

A Gregorio,

che mi ha accompagnato sin dall'inizio di questo mio percorso universitario, per avermi insegnato ad amare e per le soddisfazioni e le emozioni che mi ha regalato.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my first reader Professor Sarah Linford, who guided me in this process and challenge.

A special thanks to a real friend Claudia Torelli, who always supported and inspired me during my university years.

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Introduction

Modigliani is one of the few painters who embodied, with clarity, the Trecento, the Renaissance, and the avant-gardes. Modigliani's works were subjects of controversy for the French and Italian critics, who for a long-time classified Modigliani as a stain of French and Italian national identity. However, in 1930 because of the validation of his art by his contemporaries and art dealers Modigliani began a critical reevaluation. However, it is due to his contemporaries that in 1930 Modigliani began a positive journey in art criticism.

Modigliani remained indifferent to the “-isms” of the 20th century, which is why it was difficult for 20th century critics to see Modigliani as either a continuation of conventional art, or the beginning of unconventional treatment of subjects typical of the avant-gardes. In order to understand the great change that contemporary critics expressed from 1930 onwards toward Modigliani's art, this thesis is an examination of archival sources from 1924 until 1930. This is because during his life time sources tell us very little and critics failed to recognize Modigliani's contribution to art. For critics before 1930 Modigliani was not fitting for either French and Italian contexts.

For organizational and chronological purposes, the analysis starts with the 1917 Paris exhibition and then moves from 1922 and to 1930 Italian Biennale exhibitions looking at Modigliani's reception in both France and Italy. The first chapter focuses on the provenance and the exhibition history of the (Fig.1) *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*, 1919, which is the case study of the thesis. The second and third chapter are an analysis of the French and Italian critics towards Modigliani's art career. Finally, chapter four focuses on the reasons why

critics changed their opinion on Modigliani and why he, suddenly, became a valid solution of the modern art.

Finally, the sources used in this thesis are, principally, articles and books. Namely, on the one hand, the French section's sources come from the BNF Gallica, which helped me to have access to many primary sources that were not available in Rome. On the other hand, the Italian section's sources come from the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, and Biblioteca Centrale, Rome.

CHAPTER ONE:

PROVENANCE AND

EXHIBITION HISTORY

Provenance and Acquisition of *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*

Modigliani's *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*, 1919, was probably intended as one of a group of three paintings with the same title. *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* is now part of the permanent collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome. The other two paintings are in private collections, one in Paris and one in Zurich. All three paintings represent the same model, were painted at the same time, and belonged to the collection of Paul Guillaume, the renowned Parisian art critic, avant-garde and "primitive" art dealer who was also Modigliani's patron.¹ All three works in the series are oil on canvas and have the same dimensions: 73x111cm. *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*'s series is important for this thesis, which is to focus on the change in Modigliani's critical reception over a very short period of time. As a consequence, the three works' provenance and exhibition history enable a contextual analysis of Modigliani's critics.

The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea's *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* was first owned by Paul Guillaume. The work was then purchased by the private collector H. Belien in Brussels, who seems to have bought several of Modigliani's works from that period, such as the (Fig. 2) *Woman with Red Hair and Pendant*² of 1918 or (Fig.3) *Jeanne Hébuterne with Hat*³ of 1919. *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* was then acquired by the Gallery Marlborough in 1923, from which the Italian Galleria Nazionale d'Arte

¹ When his wife died in 1960 the family of Paul Guillaume donated his collection to the Louvre. Background information on Paul Guillaume from treccani.it/enciclopedia/paul-guillaume. Accessed on November 4, 2019.

² Amedeo Modigliani, *La Rousse au Pendentif* [*Woman with Red Hair and Pendant*], 1918. Oil on Canvas. Alicia Koplowitz, Omega Capital Art Collection.

³ Amedeo Modigliani, *Jeanne Hébuterne (Au Chapeau)*, [*Jeanne Hébuterne with Hat*], 1919. Oil on Canvas, Private collection. Source: Christie's, <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/amedeo-modigliani-1884-1920-jeanne-hebuterne-au-5650334-details.aspx>.

Moderna e Contemporanea bought the work in 1962.⁴ Modigliani's *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* is classified as a special purchase ("acquisti speciali") that Palma Bucarelli, the famed Italian art historian, art critic, and director of the GNAM⁵ bought in 1962. The letters that Palma Bucarelli and Francis Kenneth Lloyd, a Viennese entrepreneur, founder and director of the famed Marlborough gallery,⁶ exchanged in order to formalize the purchase established that Modigliani's painting was finished by the end of 1918 or the beginning of 1919—namely, when Modigliani was in France and Guillaume acted as his gallerist. For Bucarelli as for Lloyd, these were Modigliani's best years.⁷ Moreover, only after it was sold by Paul Guillaume does *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* seem to have been repeatedly exhibited.⁸

⁴ The museum purchased the painting for 80.605.500 Lire. The work was purchased along with two other paintings: The *Water Lilly*⁴ by Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Madame Ginoux*.

⁵ Background information on Palma Bucarelli. Accessed on November 4, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/palma-bucarelli/>. <http://www.palombieditori.it/detail.php?book=1170&c=93>.

⁶ Background information on Francis Kenneth Lloyd from nytimes.com/1998/04/08/arts/frank-lloyd. Accessed on November 4, 2019.

⁷ GNAM, [*Special acquisition from Marlborough Gallery*], archival document, 1962.

⁸ This section provides a look to the exhibition history of the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm's*. After Paul Guillaume's ownership, in 1950 the work was sent to Bruxelles to the Palais des Beaux- Arts; then, in 1957, it was sent to the Netherlands from June 25th to September 1st for an exhibition at The Hague, Gemeen Temuseum. In 1983, the work was sent to Spain; specifically, in 1983, to Barcelona from April to May, and in the same year, the work was sent to Madrid. Subsequently, in 1985, it was sent to the National Museum of Tokyo. Two years later, *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* was exhibited in Verona at the Galleria d'Arte. Finally, in 1990, it was exhibited in France at the Martigny Foundation Gianadda. After 1990, *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* never moved again from Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna.

**CHAPTER TWO:
FRENCH CRITICAL
RECEPTION OF
MODIGLIANI'S 1919
NUDE SERIES**

Critical Reception of Modigliani by his Contemporary French Critics

Arthur Pfannstiel, art dealer and critic, and political sympathizer and translator of Hitler and Céline,⁹ studied Modigliani extensively. He divided Modigliani's career into two epochs. In *L'Art et la Vie - Modigliani par Arthur Pfannstiel*, the author claimed: "To be correct, the works of Modigliani can be organized in two great epochs,"¹⁰ where the first epoch, largely composed of drawings, he considered "preparatory," and ending with Modigliani's move into sculpture in 1900-1909.¹¹ Modigliani's drawings are essential to understand his sculpture and painting: they are the point from which we should begin to analyze Modigliani's painted work. The second period, for Pfannstiel, started with the abandonment of sculpture and a return to painting in the decade 1909-1919.¹² The latter period can be further divided into two sub-periods: a period dedicated to portraits and a period of nudes. This period, which dates to 1917-1919, is that in which, according to Pfannstiel, Modigliani achieved perfection; it was his golden age. Indeed, he stated that 1918 was the most relevant year for Modigliani's art production. Pfannstiel considered 1918 Modigliani's best period since he was free.¹³

When Modigliani died on January 25th, 1920 at the Charité Hospital in Paris, he was not well-known, except to a small circle of artists and art collectors. After being shown in Paris in 1917 and at the 1922 Biennale in Rome, Modigliani's works received only slight, and frequently negative, critical reactions. However, after the 1930 Biennale in Rome, which included Modigliani drawings, paintings and sculptures, critics began to take positive notice of his art.

⁹ Background information on Arthur Pfannstiel from [viaf.org/viaf/Arthur Pfannstiel](http://viaf.org/viaf/Arthur%20Pfannstiel). Accessed November 1, 2019.

¹⁰ "Pour être exact, il faudrait partager l'œuvre de Modigliani en deux grandes époques." Arthur Pfannstiel, *L'Art et la Vie - Modigliani par Arthur Pfannstiel* (Paris: Editions Marcel Scheur, 1929), 121.

¹¹ Pfannstiel, *L'Art et la Vie*, 121.

¹² Pfannstiel, 121.

¹³ "L'année la plus marquante sa carrière est 1918. Dans certaines œuvres, il devint plus libre." Pfannstiel, 121.

As a consequence, sources about Modigliani's works while he was alive, come mostly from his friends, fellow artists, and art dealers, such as Carlo Carrà, Pablo Picasso, Maurice de Vlaminck, Ugo Ojetti, Leopold Zborowsky, and Paul Guillaume. The vast majority of art criticism on Modigliani dates, therefore, from 1930 onward, after the relative success of his second participation in the Biennale exhibition.

However, Modigliani showed at two important exhibitions preceding the 1930 Biennale: in 1917 and in 1922. The first, a Parisian exhibition of Modigliani's works, took place in 1917 at the Berthe Weil gallery, five years after Modigliani was first exhibited in Italy. Both exhibitions hurt Modigliani's reputation due to the negative reviews he received. In both France and Italy critics were sharply divided about Modigliani. One side defined Modigliani as Italian art's "bluff";¹⁴ the other defended Modigliani on the grounds that he was a great artist or, even, a genius. The critics who considered Modigliani a genius contributed to the turning point in Modigliani's critical reception in 1930, along with the number of essayers who contributed to Modigliani's new-found popularity. These give some sense of the complexity of Modigliani's reception by his contemporaries, especially French and Italian critics.

For organizational and chronological purposes, our analysis starts with the 1917 Paris exhibition and then moves to Modigliani's reception in Italy from 1922 to 1930. Chronological order is important to understand the changes in Modigliani's reception in both France and Italy. The Parisian exhibition was the event that planted the seeds of his later reputation and numerous critics that wrote about Modigliani's first exhibitions, in 1917 and in 1922.

¹⁴ Poche sono in Italia le persone che riconoscono il valore di Amedeo Modigliani perché, ancora oggi egli gode la fama di essere uno dei più riusciti bluff dei negozianti d' arte di Parigi. Accusato di aver abbandonate le sane vie della nostra "tradizione". Gigi Chessa, "Per Amedeo Modigliani," *L'Arte- Rivista Bimestrale di Storia dell'Arte Medievale e Moderna* (1930): 39.

1917 Modigliani's exhibition

In 1917 Leopold Zborowsky, Polish poet and one of the most important art dealers of the 20th century, who was, further, Modigliani's dealer and patron, organized the artist's first solo show at the Berthe Weil Gallery in Paris. The exhibition had huge but negative impact on Modigliani's reception because he consciously deformed his models and he deliberately did not respect anatomy.¹⁵ As a result, neither the critics nor the general public liked his works. As a consequence, some critics took notice of him, but that notice was mostly negative. Zborowsky's exhibition caused a scandal among the French public and the police intervened to remove all of Modigliani's works, which was deemed socially inappropriate.¹⁶

In contrast to Modigliani's opponents, in Paris there were many artists and critics that exalted Modigliani's art and considered him to be a genius. In addition to this, Modigliani could be associated with a group of artists, the so-called Les Italiens, which was a group of independent artists that were active in Paris despite the fact that they worked isolated from their French contemporaries. The School of Paris, which started in the early 20th century and ended by the Second World War, represented a cosmopolitan movement of European artists. The city of Paris was an attraction for European artists, as well as the birthplace of art '-isms,' such as Cubism, Fauvism, and Surrealism. The School of Paris used conventional subjects, such as portraits or landscapes, but they treated them with an innovative approach. Therefore, the School of Paris was a reaction against academic tradition. The group of Les Italiens was created by Mario Tozzi, an Italian painter whose aim was to create a core of artists able to make an

¹⁵ Giovanni Scheiwiller, "Amedeo Modigliani," *Arte Moderna Italiana*, no.8, (1935): 8.

¹⁶ Nello Ponente, *Modigliani* (Firenze: Sedea Sansoni Editori, 1969), 19.

important mark in the art world.¹⁷ Furthermore, *Les Italiens*'s main theorist was Waldemar George, one of the most influential French critics between the two wars. In 1925 George argued in *L'Amour de L'Art* that Modigliani was a genius of modern art, misunderstood by the Italian culture.

Modigliani had the privilege of being artist whose works are mythical and whose life seems to his contemporaries as a fake fact rather than reality. Modigliani along with Van Gogh, and Utrillo creates the trinity of martyr of the modern painting.¹⁸

George, a Modigliani supporter, in *L'Amour de l'Art* made the case for the relevance of Modigliani to the modern painting. He defined Modigliani as the "Myth," which in terms of Modigliani's critics is almost synonymous of genius of the 20th century; it is safe to say George perceived Modigliani as a valid and innovative solution to modern art due to Modigliani's ability to transform reality by deforming human anatomy.

The group was expected to respond to many different issues, such as the need to define a pictorial national identity. On the one hand, in Paris, those artists were very acclaimed and even considered to be magnificent artists. On the other hand, in Italy, critics did not share the same idea with the French critics. Therefore, George claimed: "By ignoring those Italian-Parisian artists, Italy would commit a serious error."¹⁹ We can understand that George was trying to make Italy aware of this matter. Modigliani could be associated to *Les Italiens* only for a short period, from 1910 until his premature death in 1920.

¹⁷ Chevretil Desbiolles, "Il critico d'arte Waldemar-George: I paradossi di un anticonformista," *Archivi ebraici*, 41, no. 2 (2008): 101-117, doi: 10.3917/aj.412.0101.

¹⁸ Modigliani ha avuto il privilegio, quello di un artista la cui opera si riveste del mito e la cui vita appare ai contemporanei come un fatto più fittizio che reale. Con Van Gogh e Utrillo, Modigliani forma la trinità dei martiri della pittura moderna. George Waldemar, "Modigliani," *L'Amour de l'Art*, no. 6, October 10, (1925).

¹⁹ Rachele, Ferrario, *Les Italiens: Sette Artisti alla Conquista di Parigi* (Torino: UTET, 2017), 94, Google Books.

George is not the only one to think this since French artists as well as critics shared George's opinion. For instance, Maurice de Vlaminck, who was a Fauve oil painter from 1900 to 1910,²⁰ watercolorist, engraver, lithographer, illustrator and writer, was in Paris in the same years as Modigliani. He wrote in *L'Art Vivant* that he considered Amedeo Modigliani to be an "aristocrat" and his art to be a natural outcome of this.²¹ He continued by saying that all of his canvases were marked with great distinction.²² According to Vlaminck, Modigliani's canvases were the witnesses of his aristocracy.²³ Vlaminck stated that what distinguished Modigliani was the ability to not see "vulgarity," "banality" or "coarseness" in any of his works.²⁴ For instance, *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* is, on the one hand, a representation of a naked woman, but on the other hand there are no traces of "vulgarity."²⁵ The unknown model posed for the artist, and we can perceive Modigliani's interest in the painting rather than in the concrete idea of the woman. As a consequence, this allowed Modigliani to detach his carnal interest by not transforming the work into a vulgar one. The position of the model is not vulgar, as Vlaminck stated, but elegant through the deliberate elongation of the body. Moreover, there are no traces of "banality" because Modigliani did not follow conventional depiction of the body, rather, he elongated his models' bodies.

Moreover, because of the boom of the art market²⁶ the number of art critics intensified, along with the number of readers. Therefore, we witness the appearance of many primary sources on Amedeo Modigliani. For instance, one of the most relevant sources came from

²⁰ Background information on Maurice de Vlaminck. Accessed November 02, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maurice-de-vlaminck/>.

²¹ "Modigliani était un aristocrate. Son œuvre entier en est le plus puissant témoignage." Maurice de Vlaminck, "Courrier de la presse," *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, November 15, (1925): 498.

²² "Ses toiles sont toutes empreintes d'une grande distinction." Vlaminck, "Courrier de la presse,": 498.

²³ "La grossièreté, la banalité, la vulgarité en sont exclues." Vlaminck, 498.

²⁴ Maurice de Vlaminck, "Souvenir de Modigliani," *L'Art Vivant*, November, (1925).

²⁵ Vlaminck, "Souvenir de Modigliani".

²⁶ Palma Bucarelli, *Modigliani*, (Roma: Editalia, 1959): 21.

Francisco Carco,²⁷ a Parisian writer who analyzed the lives of criminals and the destitute since he rejected *bourgeois* society.²⁸ In particular, Carco considered Modigliani to be a typical French *bohémien*. Carco defined the artistic bohème in these words: “It means mockery and verve.”²⁹ Because of this quote from the front page of his book dedicated to the French *bohémien*, the reader can understand the judgment Carco wished to make of Modigliani. Because of Carco we can understand that in Modigliani’s nudes there is “verve” because of the way in which they were depicted. For instance, the looseness but at the same time the *élan* of the models’ bodies transformed the relationship between the work and the viewer into a more intimate one.

Carco also examined André Salmon’s writings on Modigliani and he analyzed them in an article titled the “The Nude in the Modern Painting.” Before analyzing Carco's critique of André Salmon, it is necessary to introduce and contextualize Salmon. André Salmon was a writer, poet, and art critic best remembered as a promoter of Cubism and the author of countless essays on modern and contemporary art.³⁰ According to Salmon, “Modigliani is our only painter of nudes”³¹ and Carco agreed with Salmon. They both believed that Modigliani was able to create a relationship with the canvas; he was focused on the carnal ideal and was able to go beyond to the materiality of the drawing. In particular, in 1924, Carco argued in *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne*:

Remember those naked women thrown haphazardly on bedsheets. Their nakedness, attentive faces, fixed eyes, colored mouths colored red and brown, and their breath held

²⁷ Francis Carco is the pseudonym of François Carcopino-Tusoli.

²⁸ Background information on Francis Carco. Accessed November 02, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francis-carco/>.

²⁹ “Bohème d’artiste: c’est à dire la cocasserie, la verve” Francis Carco, *La Vie de Bohème* (Paris: Imprimere E. Durand, 1929), [n.p.]

³⁰ Background information on André Salmon. Accessed November 02, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andre-salmon/>.

³¹ “Modigliani est notre seul peintre de nu” André Salmon, *Modigliani sa Vie et son Œuvre* (Paris : Éditions des Quatre Chemins, 1926): 17.

in their breasts... A provocative and direct love of materiality, a torment to the artist, from which he sought to free himself.³²

As Carco stated, Modigliani's search to go beyond materiality included the depiction of "their breath held in their breasts."³³ Moreover, Carco's quotation is a description of each of Modigliani's works with a particular attention to the anatomy of the women depicted. Namely, Carco presents the main characteristics of Modigliani's models as well as his sentimental approach in and to the painting process. In the article, Carco was not negatively commenting on Modigliani but was, rather, exalting his diversity, which consists in a different approach towards the models.

The fact that both Salmon and Carco considered Modigliani to be a creative element in the world of art shows the positive evaluation that some of his critics had in the French scene context. In addition, Carco in 1918 argued about Modigliani's exhibition at the Paul Guillaume Gallery, held from 15th to 23rd December that:

Modigliani is a reformed humorist who has been 'Cubing' for a while so as not to draw attention to himself and who is now distorting, stretching out and elongating his faces under the dual influence of Maori fetishism and André Derain.³⁴

Carco's critique of Modigliani's exhibition is pertinent to this thesis since "Maori fetishism" refers to Modigliani's elongation of his models and his summary treatment of their faces, while the connection with André Derain is due to Modigliani's use of color and flatness in depicting his models.

Moreover, Carco studied Modigliani's nudes. Specifically, in his book *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne*, Carco divided nudes of modern painting into two categories; he isolated

³² "Rappelez-vous ces femmes dévêtues et jetées tout trac sur des draps de hasard, ces nudités aux visages attentifs, aux yeux fixes, ces bouches maquillées de rouge brun, ce souffle arrêté des poitrines... Un amour outrageant et direct de la matière, dont le peintre cherchait à se dégager, le tourmentait." Francis Carco, *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne* (Paris : Les éditions G. Crès, 1924) cited in Christian Parisot, *Modigliani*, 1992: 92.

³³ Parisot, *Modigliani*, 1992, 92.

³⁴ Francis Carco as cited in Parisot, 87

Modigliani from other artists of nudes by praising his unicity. According to Carco, Modigliani differed from other masters because of his lack of method for painting skin.³⁵ That is to say that Modigliani did not follow set rules in the depiction of the skin of his models. Carco also compared Modigliani to Rubens.³⁶ Starting with Modigliani, he recognized that between the light and the skin there is an impalpable veil which is translucent, and that sparkles in the light. In particular, the two *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* from the series differ from the GNAM's version in which it is possible to see the signature style of the artist. In other words, the colors are layered added rapidly.

By contrast, Modigliani's other nudes are matt, reflecting no light, and the strokes are uniform. Examples include the (Fig. 4) *Red Nude*³⁷, which was exhibited with *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*'s in 1917 at the Berthe Weil Gallery in the Rue Taitbout. *The Red Nude* presents matt colors like those of the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*'s but it shows different brushstrokes unlike the uniform ones in the *Red Nude*. The backgrounds seem painted by different artists because the brushstrokes in *Red Nude* are more regular and spontaneous.

The dramatic comparison between Modigliani and Rubens is not applicable to the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* because the strokes are not uniform, but rather dissimilar. Moreover, the different pressures applied to the canvas let the lucidity and the transparency of colors shine through.

³⁵ Francis Carco, *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne* (Paris : Les éditions G. Crès, 1924) Cited in Parisot Christian, Modigliani, 1992, 102.

³⁶ Carco, *Le Nu dans la Peinture Moderne*, 102.

³⁷ Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu Couché*, [*Red Nude*], 1917. Oil on canvas, 1917. Mattioli Collection. Source: <https://www.tribune.com/professionni-e-professionisti/mercato/2016/12/mercato-intervista-giovanna-bertazzoni-christies/attachment/amedeo-modigliani-nu-couche-1917-18>.

In addition to this, Carco classified the nudes in two categories. The first is represented by the (Fig. 5) *Portrait of Elvira*, 1919:³⁸ it is characterized by gentle sensuality and modesty. On the other hand, (Fig. 6) *Laying Nude of 1917*,³⁹ which is the other painting cited by Carco, is described as full of sensuality and desire. The desire is aggressive but not vulgar. Because of Carco's analyses, we can understand the difference between aggressive and vulgar, which is relevant since, as mentioned above, in 1917 during the exhibition of Modigliani's nudes, the critics and viewers classified his paintings as scandalous.

Adolphe Basler, art historian, art critic, writer, art collector, and art dealer, best summarized Modigliani's dual nature, when he argued

Modigliani is an attractive, unique figure. Living the most disorganized life ever, this painter/ sculptor and sculptor/ painter was still able to produce wonderful nudes equally choice portraits.⁴⁰

Gustave Coquiot further analyzed the figure of Modigliani in his 1920 book, *Des Peintres Maudits*. Coquiot was a French art historian, art critic, author, editor, composer, and commentator.⁴¹ His opinion of Modigliani was straightforward. In 1924 Coquiot argued in *Des Peintres maudits*:

Modigliani is a singular and charming figure. During his disorganized life of painting-sculpture and sculpture-painting he was able to create wonderful nudes as well as portraits. [...] In drawings he was experienced, able to make subtle, virtuoso and of unique quality. Modigliani is the most synthetic, the most elegant, and the most precious.⁴²

³⁸ Amedeo Modigliani, *Elvire au col blanc*, [*Portrait of Elvira*], 1919.

³⁹ Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)*, [*Lying Nude*], 1917.

⁴⁰ Sylvie Buisson, "The Critics on Modigliani or the Dual Nature of his art" in *Modigliani* eds. Christian Parisot, (Paris: Terrail, 1992), 146.

⁴¹ Background information on Gustave Coquiot from worldcat.org/identities. Accessed on November 4, 2019.

⁴² "C'est un figure singulière, attirante, que celle de Modigliani! Dans la vie la plus désorbitée qui fût, ce peintre-sculpteur et ce sculpteur-peintre sut réaliser des nus merveilleux et des portraits non moins élus. [...] Et quel dessin, habile, subtil, d'une virtuosité folle, d'une qualité unique ! Modigliani est-il plus synthétique, plus raffiné, plus précieux" Gustave Coquiot, *Des Peintres maudits*, (Paris : Delpuech, 1924) 107-108.

Indeed, Modigliani was interested in sculpture. In addition, he considered himself firstly as a sculptor and then as a painter.⁴³ For instance, for many years Modigliani only drew and only when he was confident in drawings, he abandoned it for sculpture. The dual nature of his art; namely, relating both to drawing and painting is always visible too in his use of sculptural elements. He treated faces as stones to be carved. As a consequence, his models' faces are very static. In *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*, the face can be compared to African sculptures, such as the (Fig. 7) *Woman's Head*,⁴⁴ 1912. Both faces are geometric. In particular, if we take into consideration the nose of the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*, we perceive similarity in geometric structure; the noses are two straight lines. Moreover, according to Coquiote, Modigliani had a different approach to art due to his interest and evaluation in those kinds of lines. Coquiote was interested in Modigliani's dual nature, or the ability to be, as mentioned previously, painter-sculptor and sculptor-painter. We can say that according to Coquiote, Modigliani's works are singular.

Furthermore, according to French art historian Sylvie Buisson, the synthesis of the facial features of Modigliani's work is the outcome of an appropriation of Italian "primitives" such as Duccio. In 1992 Buisson argued in "The Critics on Modigliani":

The Gothic nature of his art, which was also dominated by a love of the vertical, had its birth in Italy. His figures are rendered spiritual, even disembodied. The measured elongation of the limbs, the desire to make the body columnar, the feeling for the surface of the painting, are all symptomatic of his Gothic qualities. Modigliani was Gothic from the start, as were the painters of the Trecento, such as Barno and Duccio.⁴⁵

Indeed, Modigliani consciously and deliberately re-interprets his models, such as in *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*'s long nose and elongated oval face. Moreover, her eyes are

⁴³ Alfred Werner, "Modigliani as a Sculptor," *Art Journal* 20, no. 2, (1960): 70.

⁴⁴ Amedeo Modigliani. *Tête [Woman's Head]*, 1912, Limestone. The Metropolitan Museum.

⁴⁵ Buisson, "The Critics on Modigliani", cited in Parisot: 146.

the best example of his reinterpretation of a past tradition. The eyes separate the model from reality because they do not allow the viewer to understand where she is looking. On the contrary, her mouth is the only anatomical element that respects nature, as indeed her mouth is not elongated or deformed.

Overall, Modigliani's art production can be divided in two epochs in which, as mentioned above, he never strictly belonged to *Les Italiens* or the School of Paris; indeed, he was an independent figure in orbit of the two. However, they shared similar ideas which allow us to discern similarities. Following chronological order has allowed us to understand the change in reception among the French art critics, who after the 1917 exhibition, were divided among those who disregarded Modigliani and those who admired his work. The latter considered Modigliani to be a special figure of the modern art, such as George who urged Italy to recognize Modigliani as part of its heritage, or Carco who exalted Modigliani's diversity among other modern painters. In summary, Modigliani for the French art critics of this period, Modigliani was a singular figure because of his dual nature, which was always clear in his works.

**CHAPTER THREE:
ITALIAN CRITICAL
RECEPTION OF
MODIGLIANI'S 1919
NUDE SERIES**

Critical Reception of Modigliani by his Contemporary Italian Critics

Five years after the 1917 Paris exhibition, critics had the same negative opinion of Modigliani's art in Italy. Vittorio Pica, for instance, an Italian writer, art critic, and entertainer of artistic and literary circles⁴⁶ wrote in his 1922, "La XVIIe Exposition Internationale et Biennale de Venise et sa Nouvelle Sélection", where he mounted an exhibition of thirteen of Modigliani's paintings with a specific aim, that:

In order to encourage the detachment of Italian artists from cosmopolitan currents, that are contrary to both the spirit and the sentiment of race, and in order to respect the tradition of beauty, and of truly human inspiration, implies symmetry, proportion, and the expression of the character of the models.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, Pica's aim was not sufficient to persuade the critics, and the works exhibited left a negative general negative impression on the public. Critics were irritated since according to the general opinion the Biennale was a place reserved for good artists. Pica was disappointed by the Italians because his aim was to teach the Italian public to understand and appreciate a great modern Italian master such as Modigliani. In addition, Lionello Venturi, Italian art critic, art historian, and university professor, and one of the few who did not swear the oath to Italian fascism,⁴⁸ claimed: "Modigliani is a national glory."⁴⁹ Venturi interpreted Pica's aim and agreed with it. Because of Venturi's quote we understand that Modigliani was not only perceived as a negative figure in Italian art, but rather the opposite. Even though Modigliani spent his life in

⁴⁶ Background information on Vittorio Pica. Accessed on November 6, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittorio-pica/>.

⁴⁷ "Pour encourager le détachement des artistes italiens des courants cosmopolites, contraires à l'esprit et au sentiment de la race, et pour les ramener à une inspiration vraiment humaine, à un goût instinctif et traditionnel de la beauté, de la symétrie, des proportions, de l'expression et du caractère" Vittorio Pica, "La XVII Exposition Internationale et Biennale de Venise et sa Nouvelle Sélection," *Commedia / rédacteur en chef : Gaston de Pawlowski*, (1930).

⁴⁸ Background information on Lionello Venturi from. Accessed on November 6, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://treccani.it/enciclopedia/lionello-venturi>.

⁴⁹ "Modigliani è una gloria nazionale" Lionello Venturi, *Biennale di Venezia XVII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*, (1930): 404.

Paris, he was Italian. Consequently, his art was a glory for Italy. In 1930 Margherita Sarfatti, an Italian journalist who participated in Fascist propaganda, among other things as editor for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, argued:

Modigliani met the requirements of the typical role of the Italian genius in every field. The cosmopolitan influence of the French avant-garde affected him in the purest way. Modigliani is one of the guiding spirits of modern painting, and his influence contributes to establishing his first role with an Italian, Tuscan background.⁵⁰

Sarfatti's quote is a commendation of Modigliani and his art. This shows specifically when she says: "He is one of the guiding spirits of the modern art,"⁵¹ which reveals that his French experience was essential to establishing Modigliani as both an avant-garde and Italian painter, of Tuscan artistic background.

Nevertheless, there were also critics hostile to Modigliani and his art. Some even negate his works' artistic value. They defined the Modigliani exhibition as shameful and as a trick played on the Italian public.⁵² One example is Cipriano Efisio Oppo, Italian painter, art critic and scenographer. He joined the Valori Plastici group right after The First World War, and from 1929 to 1943 he became the first assistant of the Roman Quadriennale.⁵³ He claimed: "Modigliani's art belongs to a period that is already finished."⁵⁴ In addition to Oppo, Franco Saponi, an Italian art critic, who wrote in *Arte Mondiale alla XIIIa Esposizione a Venezia*, stated:

Modigliani's time in Paris introduced him to a style of art that influenced his work until the end of his days. The portraits, which are characterized by static and vulgar poses, deliver a sense of suffering. They reveal a difficult synthesis and anguish.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ "Modigliani adempite a una delle funzioni tipiche della genialità italiana, in ogni campo. L'influenza dell'ambiente cosmopolita francese di avanguardia operò su lui nel senso più puro e migliore. Questo livornese è uno degli spiriti guida della pittura moderna e la sua influenza contribuisce enormemente a ricondurvi in primo piano l'elemento dell'italicità toscana." Margherita Sarfatti, Modigliani, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, (1930).

⁵¹ Sarfatti, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 1930.

⁵² "Qui siamo in una farsa." Arturo Lancellotti, *Biennale del Dopoguerra*, 1924.

⁵³ Background information on Cipriano Efisio Oppo. Accessed on November 6, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cipriano-efisio-oppo/>.

⁵⁴ "L'arte di Modigliani appartiene a un periodo che si è già chiuso, inesorabilmente" E Oppo Cipriano, Modigliani, *La Tribuna*, May 14, (1930).

⁵⁵ La sua residenza a Parigi determinò in lui un indirizzo d'arte che ha coltivato fino all'ultimo. Queste dozzine di ritratti, dalle pose statiche e volgari tramandano un non so che di tribolo, persino la dove le tinte appaiono sposate

Sapori and Oppo's statements give a sense of the Italian context: intellectuals were already adhering to Fascist ideology; hence, they do not attribute a positive national role to Modigliani or his art. In other words, for these Fascist supporters, Amedeo Modigliani was not creating a type of art able to satisfy their desire for a national and nationalistic avant-garde since they were looking for an art able to exalt Italy and not to "shame" it through anatomical deformation and primitivizing formal elements.

Two years later, in 1924, Arturo Lancellotti, Italian writer and art critic, argued in the "Biennale del dopo Guerra":

When an entire room is dedicated to Amedeo Modigliani and to avant-garde artists, I ask myself why. This is shameful! The elongated neck of the ostrich and those faces with the same line as if they are astigmatic are looking at them. Those are art neither psychological penetration.⁵⁶

Lancellotti's reception of Modigliani is cruel and depreciative; it confirmed the negative impressions that a great number of Italian critics had of Modigliani. His reference to the ostrich's neck is an exaggeration but also a clear misunderstanding of Modigliani's art.

Despite the negative reception of the 1922 exhibition, Modigliani was again exhibited at the Biennale in 1930. His thirty works, sculptures and paintings, were displayed in room number 31. In 1930, Lionello Venturi, one of the major Italian art critics of Modigliani's works, in the catalogue of the Venice Biennale, compared Cézanne's lines to Modigliani's and he argued:

The line development seems to display many elements to create depth, and so it seems that he considers the aim of art to be its decorative value. However, we realize this is

rivelano una sintesi faticosa vicine ad uno stile tormentato. Franco Sapori, *Arte Mondiale alla XIII Esposizione a Venezia*, (1922).

⁵⁶ "Quando un'intera stanza è dedicata ad Amedeo Modigliani e altri artisti dell'Avanguardia, mi chiedo il perché. Siamo in una farsa. Questi colli allungati, come i colli degli struzzi e queste facce dalla stessa linea come se fossero osservati da un astigmatico. Questi non sono né arte né penetrazione psicologica." Arturo Lancellotti, *Biennale del Dopoguerra*, (1924).

not true. His lines never develop on the same level. They create surface illusion. Unlike Cézanne, Modigliani does not construct depth. They speak different languages.⁵⁷

Indeed, Modigliani, did not utilize borders as a decorative element, but rather as a vehicle to isolate the figure from the rest. His lines have no depth, nor do they construct space. When all these elements are taken into consideration, we understand that Modigliani studied Cézanne, nor do they construct space. For instance, in *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* lines show a great equilibrium of volumes. His lines are rounded, and they give rhythm to the nude. The rounded hip which is twisted up, for example, gives rhythm and balance to the painting.

In 1927, Giovanni Scheiwiller, an art critic and writer of monographs, published in *Arte Moderna Italiana* his first edition of a monograph on Amedeo Modigliani.⁵⁸ Scheiwiller was the first Italian writer to have published a book dedicated to Amedeo Modigliani. As a consequence, there are good reasons to argue that Scheiwiller's publication played a part in the critical reception of Amedeo Modigliani.⁵⁹ According to Scheiwiller, his different approach to lines allowed Modigliani to be freed of anatomical rules; for Scheiwiller Modigliani consciously ignored human anatomy and intentionally deformed bodies.⁶⁰ Examples include Modigliani's long and deformed necks, and the pale, emaciated and abbreviated faces that give a vibrant touch to his canvases.

⁵⁷ “Lo sviluppo della linea sembra riporti sul piano molti elementi creati per la profondità e che quindi egli consideri come scopo dell'arte il valore decorativo. E poi ci si accorge che non è affatto così e che le sue linee non si sviluppano mai sopra un medesimo piano e realizzano in un'apparenza di superficie. Se cioè si assume in Cézanne il simbolo della visione costruttiva in profondità Modigliani parla un linguaggio diverso.” Lionello Venturi, *La XVII Biennale di Venezia. Biennale di Venezia*, (1930). Cited in Nello Ponente, *Modigliani*, (Rome: Editalia, 1959): 27.
⁵⁸ Background information on Giovanni Scheiwiller from <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-scheiwiller>. Accessed on November 17, 2019.

⁵⁹ “Modigliani nel lustro 1925-1930, periodo cruciale della sua affermazione in ambito internazionale.” Paolo Rusconi, “Sulla Redazione dell'Amedeo Modigliani di Giovanni Scheiwiller e il suo contesto,” *Studi di Memo fonte* no. 20 (2018): 116, https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/615830/1144839/RUSCONI_Memofonte2018.pdf.

⁶⁰ “Il ignorait, volontairement l'anatomie du corps humain car il avait compris qu'il ne s'agissait pas de représentation pure et simple du corps, mais en premier lieu de création d'une perception nouvelle, d'une esthétique moderne.” Scheiwiller, *Amedeo Modigliani*, (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1927): 112.

Scheiwiller continued with the nudes. He distinguishes two categories of nudes. Firstly, the ones that Modigliani never depicted because he was moved by strong passions and beautiful feelings due to his fascinating and charming models. In particular, he was moved by carnal passions. As a consequence, if he had painted those models, he would have gone against article 338 of the French penal code.⁶¹ This code stated that even if the penal code did not directly mention the name of Modigliani or even referred to the art world, we can understand why Modigliani's nudes were not accepted by the French public. For instance, according to the penal code and the mentality of the time, Modigliani would have gone against the 338 article by virtue of seeming indecent. With respect to these paintings, Scheiwiller claimed: "I do not know nudes of modern painters which give me a pleased sensation and spiritual intimacy as Modigliani can."⁶²

Scheiwiller's statement highlights the esteem he had for Modigliani. "Modigliani is for me one of the best painters of modern times".⁶³ In other words, Modigliani for Scheiwiller is the result of a great study and appropriation of past masters and periods applied in a new context and for a different need, such as the avant-garde in the world of art in the shadow of the First World War. Indeed, Modigliani reinvents many elements which come from past tradition. In his art one can see references to Titian, Ingres, Manet, and Renoir, interpreted with a modern touch⁶⁴. The modern touch is intended as the voluntary choice of decontextualizing the figure

⁶¹ "Était absolument étranger à la femme ; et qu'à son égard l'adultère, laisse dans la classe ordinaire des délits, pouvait être prouvé par tous les documents propres à l'établir, et qu'ainsi, il importait fort peu que le complice ait été absous faute de preuves précisées par le Code pénal ; que cette circonstance ne formait aucun obstacle à la condamnation de la femme d'ailleurs convaincue, quel que fut le genre de preuve administrée contre elle." France Cour d'appel, *Journal de jurisprudence civile et commerciale, ou Recueil des arrêts notables de la Cour d'appel*, (Paris : Colmar, 1816) : 40.

⁶² Giovanni, Scheiwiller, *Amedeo Modigliani*, 11.

⁶³ "Fra i tipi più singolari d' artisti che abbia prodotto l'attuale generazione occupa certamente uno dei posti migliori il livornese Amedeo Modigliani." Giovanni, Scheiwiller, 5.

⁶⁴ André Salmon, *L'Art Vivant*, 1926.

from the surrounding as well as deformation through the dissociation of figuration from anatomy. In 1927, Scheiwiller also analyzed the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* and he argued:

The body is constructed in the shape of a pyramid; a flavorful line leads our eye to the hand holding the fan, and from there to the décolleté. In the works from his last years, color is more subtle, lighter. The composition of *Reclining Nude* is the simplest one could imagine: a horizontal line; a figure seen in profile; close eyes as in sleep; the reclining body exudes a calmness that captivates and seduces the viewer forever.⁶⁵

Lamberto Vitali is the other major figure that reversed the Italian situation. He was an Italian writer who was focused on the history of engraving. He also worked together with Scheiwiller, and was an art critic.⁶⁶ In 1930, he claimed:

The modern critic dispenses praise and commends every street artist for his genius and beauty, as though these were pennies. I am almost afraid of words, but I am blind, or Italy will have to recognize in Modigliani a draftsman on the same level as that of the ‘antique classics.’⁶⁷

Vitali’s quote is straightforward and clearly highlights the point: Italy was not ready to recognize Modigliani as part of Italy's artistic heritage. The term ‘blind’ implies that Italy is incapable of the problem recognizing the best among its own avant-garde artists. Moreover, the statement was also a call to action for Italy since Modigliani was an Italian and his art had the right to be recognized as such.

⁶⁵ “Le corps est construit en forme de pyramide ; une ligne savoureuse conduit notre œil de la main à l’éventail et de là au décolleté. La composition y est la plus simple qu’on puisse imaginer : la ligne horizontale ; la figure est de profil ; les yeux fermés. Comme dans le sommeil ; du corps allongé.” Scheiwiller, *Modigliani*, 123.

⁶⁶ Background information on Lamberto Vitali from memofonte.it/ricerche/lamberto-vitali-e-la-grafica. Accessed on November 9, 2019.

⁶⁷ “Oggi la critica fa grande dispendio di lodi e regala ad ogni canto di strada genio e bellezza come se fossero monete da quattro soldi, io ho quasi paura delle parole, ma io sono cieco o l’Italia dovrà pur decidersi a riconoscere in Modigliani un disegnatore da porre accanto ai suoi classici antichi” Cited in Nello Ponente, *Modigliani* (Milan: Sedea Sansoni, 1959): 26.

Another major contemporary critic of Modigliani's was Luigi Maria Giorgi Chessa, also known as Gigi Chessa, an Italian painter, architect, scenographer, and potter.⁶⁸ According to Chessa, Modigliani's talent is a gift that artists naturally have⁶⁹, and so it was not a skill learned in the academies. For Chessa Modigliani unconsciously drew models based on the Italian Trecento-Quattrocento as well as Renaissance tradition.⁷⁰ Modigliani was rooted in the Italian tradition without being academic. In addition, he argued that Modigliani is not looking for elements that prevail in his contemporaries, such as the use of light that excites his French colleagues. It is true for instance in his choice color, which Chessa defined as 'local color'⁷¹ or the true color of a body or object in unbiased light that does not change with different illumination since it is independent from any lighting source.

Consequently, according to Chessa, in Modigliani's paintings the viewer does not see any kind of shadow or reflection. In this way, Modigliani rejects the modern approach to color, such as Monet's interest for the change of light. Monet was influenced by the theory of Michel-Eugène Chevreul, who changed the perception of color in the 19th century. Namely, he noticed that colors look brighter or duller according to the color they have next to them and that simultaneous contrasts of color recreate the effect of light in the viewer's eye. On the contrary, Modigliani looked to the Italian primitives, such as Duccio and Giotto, or even to Byzantine art where color had an arbitrary or symbolic, and not optical, function. Similar to the Italian primitives, Modigliani stretched out color in defined areas. Because of Chessa's idea of local color, we can apply the concept to *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* in which 'local

⁶⁸ Background information on Luigi Maria Giorgio Chessa from archivioceramica.com/CERAMISTI/C/chessa/gigi. Accessed on November 7, 2019.

⁶⁹ "Avendone il dono, senza cercarlo." Gigi Chessa, "Per Amedeo Modigliani," *L'Arte Rivista Bimestrale di Storia dell'Arte Medievale e Moderna*, Folder no.1 January, (1930): 38.

⁷⁰ "Modigliani realizza nella 'tradizione' senza volerlo." Chessa, "Per Amedeo Modigliani," 38-39.

⁷¹ "Modigliani è rimasto indifferente alle ricerche di quella luce che interessa tutta la grande pittura francese. Il suo colore vuole sempre essere solamente 'colore locale' e cioè con un valore assoluto". Chessa, 39.

color' is strongly present. The artist recreated local color in two ways. First, because of different shades of skin-tones and second because of an emphasis on brushstroke. Modigliani visually recreates the different shades of the skin; indeed, some parts are lighter than others: the torso, for example, shines compared to the pelvic area which is darker. Moreover, the brushstrokes are short, impetuous, wild, and thick. Hence, his approach brushwork is not relaxed, but rather violent. Modigliani's wrist goes back and forth in a rapid and anxious way. He does not give any specific direction to the brushstroke. Modigliani does not have entire control of the brushstroke; as a consequence, some areas have more impasto than others. This is exactly what Chessa meant too when he wrote:

Modigliani's nudes are carnal and chastens, the color is a close impasto which declares sensuality and melancholy. Any possible vulgarity, which is so far away in Modigliani's nudes, becomes purity⁷².

Chessa continued his analysis on volumes. This can be illustrated by the idea that in Modigliani's works the volume is slightly sketched; however, he evokes the body's areas with the simplest synthetic touches. To conclude, Chessa resumes the main theme present in the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* with a particular attention to the synthesis of forms. For instance, the model eyes are an almond or the long and thin neck are reduced to simple and elementary forms. Similarly, the background and the foreground are reduced to their essentiality. They are almost imperceptible because they are too simplified. Nevertheless, the drawing is alive and when a form becomes too abstract and synthetic, the line of the drawing makes the form real. Chessa concludes by saying that in Modigliani the line is reduced to what is necessary. He reached the peak of synthesis and was able to make his nudes pure.⁷³ Overall,

⁷² Chessa, 40.

⁷³ Chessa, 40.

Modigliani's *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm* is one of the best examples to understand his synthesis of forms, as well as the use of colors.

Valori Plastici and Modigliani

Modigliani's most productive years coincide with those of the Valori Plastici group, which began to publish at the beginning of 1919 and until the end of 1922. Mario Broglio, founder of the *Valori Plastici* periodical, was an Italian painter, sculptor and art publisher. He intensely influenced Italian contemporary art in the 1920s especially.⁷⁴ However, Mario Broglio is not a prominent figure of the *Valori Plastici* group because the active body of the journal was formed by Giorgio de Chirico, Carlo Carrà, Alberto Savinio and Ugo Ojetti. Chirico was an Italian artist and writer who is considered the best exponent of Metaphysical art.⁷⁵ Carlo Carrà was an Italian artist and teacher at the Accademia delle belle Arti of Brera from 1938 to 1951 and one of the preeminent figures of 20th century Italian art.⁷⁶ Alberto Savinio, the pseudonym of Andrea de Chirico and brother of Giorgio de Chirico was also an artist⁷⁷, and Ugo Ojetti was an Italian writer and journalist and an art critic.⁷⁸ *Valori Plastici* focused on art, in particular modern contemporary art. It had several goals, such as to 're-assert' the conception of art as an Italian experience within its traditions, and to retrieve the place that the avant-garde

⁷⁴ Background information on Mario Broglio from [treccani.it/enciclopedia/mario-broglio](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/mario-broglio). Accessed on November 7, 2019.

⁷⁵ Background information on Giorgio de Chirico. Accessed on November 7, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giorgio-de-chirico/>.

⁷⁶ Background information on Carlo Carrà. Accessed on November 7, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-carra/>.

⁷⁷ Background information on Alberto Savinio. Accessed on November 7, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alberto-savinio/>.

⁷⁸ Background information on Ugo Ojetti. Accessed on November 7, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ugo-ojetti/>.

artists lost. Namely, Valori Plastici's major concern was to dissolve the uncertainty created after the First World War in order to re-stabilize order and equilibrium in art. It avoided Futurism, which was taking over at the same time 1919. In addition, Futurism proposed the adoration to dynamism as well as to technology. Futurists refused vital relations with the past. They proposed opposite canons to Valori Plastici's. Therefore, they were enemies. In addition, Giorgio de Chirico clearly referred to the Futurists and he compared them to war in the article "Il Ritorno al Mestiere." He followed by claiming that just as the First World War was necessary, Futurism was necessary as well, but both were unnecessary for Italy. As de Chirico claimed, the Great War affected every field of everyday life; it changed the social and cultural backgrounds for everyone. As a consequence, after the war, even in the world of art there was an extended feeling of loneliness and bewilderment. The war ended but there were still traces of it. For instance, people were afraid but at the same time they wanted to react. Furthermore, there was a dramatic need for transformation and the past memory of Futurism. It was clear that there is a new need and art is welcoming it. Valori Plastici adopted simplicity in a contemporary sense. In other words, it emphasized an awareness of the past. Paolo Fossati was an Italian art critic, professor, and art historian who was also the founder and curator of the Italian encyclopedia⁷⁹ called *Storia dell' Arte Italiana*. According to Paolo Fossati, Valori Plastici was not looking for 'classicism' as an absolute value, example, or rule, but rather for a deep reflection to art in order to create an organic and ordered 'body'⁸⁰.

The key words for Valori Plastici were: calm and essence.⁸¹ During the Return to order, artists were looking for legibility, figuration, mass and volume, and drawing. Firstly, legibility

⁷⁹ Background information of Paolo Fossati from catalogue.bnf.fr. Accessed on November 7, 2019.

⁸⁰ "La classicità come stimolo e non come modulo, come esempio e non come legge" Paolo Fossati, *Valori Plastici 1818-22* (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1981): 77.

⁸¹ Fossati, *Valori Plastici*, 4.

was achieved through drawing and shading with often illusionistic space. Secondly, figuration was related to the human body through the depiction of mass and volumes; the human figure also returned as subject matter. Nevertheless, Valori Plastici literally means plastic/ pictorial values of a national avant-garde rooted in tradition.

Moreover, the art critics of the Italian Return to Order had a concise aim, which was not to fall in any aesthetic or philosophical trap, as well as in any attempt of definition. De Chirico claimed “The art critic is an animal who has never existed in Italy. It is the role of the intellectual to find space to exalt the artwork”.⁸² De Chirico's powerful statement is the key to introduce the Italian reception of Amedeo Modigliani, with a particular focus on the *Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*.

The relationship between Valori Plastici and Amedeo Modigliani is one related to the other because Valori Plastici was against the Futurists' rejection of the female nude and Modigliani depicted nudes. Therefore, taking into consideration that female nudity is emblematic of tradition, Modigliani is responding to Valori Plastici's aim as well as creating anti-Futurist art.

Modigliani's nudes, in this context, evoke a kind of “classicism”. He followed the European tradition in his choice of the subject matter, but he also proposed a modern approach to the female nude. For instance, he was not looking for mimesis or to respect anatomy. Modigliani's nudes are without elements such as landscapes or furniture that would contextualize his models. What makes them precious is their autonomy. They are timeless and contextless. This is the novelty of his nudes. It is a truism that his paintings are the outcome of a deep study of the Renaissance, and so is, yes, responding to Valori Plastici's aims since his

⁸² Fossati, 150.

paintings are examples of drawing, figuration, and legibility. However, he does not propose mass and volume. His nudes are flat, and his shadows are almost invisible.

CHAPTER FOUR:
1930, OR
MODIGLIANI'S
TURNING POINT

Italy, long the core of the European art, assisted to a huge migratory phenomenon of a great number of artists. Marion Lagrange, professor of art history as well as author of *Les Peintres Italiens en quête d'identité, Paris 1855-1909*,⁸³ classified this phenomenon as a “colony of artists”⁸⁴ because Paris assisted to the immigration of countless artists, and Amedeo Modigliani was one of many.

Further, a great number of artists who moved to Paris where Jewish and they took different decisions from the prominent artistic movements of the time, such as Cubism. Hence, we understand why it is not possible to classify or link Modigliani to any specific avant-garde movement. He was not part of any. Indeed, Modigliani’s portraits as well as nudes referred to conventional subjects; however, his stylistic strategies drastically turned the ‘conventional’ into ‘unconventional’. For instance, his models’ almond eyes, elongated necks as well as bodies transformed the traditional representation of women, typical of Italian academic art, into a new language.

Modigliani’s treatment of traditional subjects shocked both the French and the Italian critics, who split in two groups. One side championed the conservative ideas of ‘official’ art; the other, who was aware of the social and political issues after the First World War, understood the new need of artists.

From the beginning of the 20th century avant-garde artists were perceived as opponents of academic art, in which the tradition was perceived as a direct link to French national identity. As a consequence, according to Christopher Green, author of *Art in France 1900-1940*, tradition

⁸³ Background information on Marion Lagrange from babelio.com/auteur/Marion-Lagrange. Accessed on November 9, 2019.

⁸⁴ “Dans cette perspective, il convient d’apprécier la force du lien entre ces artistes et leur nation d’origine, et l’existence d’une «colonie» artistique.” Marion Lagrange, *Les Peintres Italiens en quête d'identité, Paris : 1855-1909* (Paris : INHA/CTHS, 2010): 13. Google Books.

was considered intrinsic to national identity.⁸⁵ He commended Impressionism and Cubism as attacks to French tradition and national identity. In 1906, Camille Mauclair, a French essayist and writer,⁸⁶ recognized Impressionism as a return to French tradition. Mauclair claimed: “The conquest of Impressionism represented the renewal of a quintessentially French tradition. This tradition linked Renoir, Manet, and the masters of the 18th century”.⁸⁷ In other words, Mauclair identified Impressionism as a key element able to link the modernity with the ‘classical’. Moreover, Green also cites Cubism, which was considered as a “foreign invasion”⁸⁸ by the artists who moved in France. After the First World War, Jean Cocteau reorganized this period of incongruities, and he coined the “call to order”⁸⁹ to explain this evolution within the avant-gardes. By the end of 1917, Cocteau’s idea of returning to order was directly linked with the concept of ‘classicism’.⁹⁰ Green justified the need for a return to order in art as a need of calm after a long period of confusion, before and after the First World War.

Moreover, Green defined Derain as “timeless”.⁹¹ In 2000, Green in *Art in France 1900-1940* argued:

Derain stands for the persistence of the past even in the mechanized present, his landscapers, figures, and portraits prove the persistence and vitality of a culture, which has rounded the cape of Americanism (mechanism) and Africanism (primitivism) [...] Derain’s models are no longer prostitutes but nudes.⁹²

⁸⁵ Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 186.

⁸⁶ Background information on Camille Mauclair. Accessed on November 21, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <https://www.wordreference.com/iten/saggista>.

⁸⁷ Camille Mauclair cited in Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, 187.

⁸⁸ Green, 197.

⁸⁹ *Rappel à l’Ordre* in French and *Valori Plastici* in Italian.

⁹⁰ Green, 197.

⁹¹ Green, 224.

⁹² Green, 224.

What Green states on Derain might be applied to Modigliani, who was against Cubism, and intended in classical subjects. Moreover, Modigliani's models were not prostitutes but women who posed for him, and his only purpose was to paint them.

As mentioned previously, Modigliani was first exhibited in Paris in 1917, but the exhibition was not successful except for three main figures who started the French critical fortune of Modigliani, specifically George, Vlaminck, and Carco. These art critics and artists radically changed the French perception of Modigliani. Specifically, because of their publications they spurred Parisian readers to change their negative opinions on the artist. Indeed, the 1917 exhibition created a negative outcome among the public, because of two reasons. First, Modigliani's works were not 'traditional' representation of female nudes. Second, they did not respect the set rules of anatomy. However, George perceived in Modigliani an original depiction of bodies, and defined him as a 'genius'⁹³ of art. As we have mentioned, Modigliani consciously and deliberately deformed the bodies. However, he never abandoned classic culture. His Italian studies, as well as his educational journeys to Italy, such as to Florence and Venice, allowed him to refine his style without ever ignoring his Italian background. For instance, his drawings always showed tradition in terms of space organization.

Modigliani's different approach to anatomy was not vulgar, as many French viewers defined it, but rather elegant. For instance, Vlaminck defined Modigliani as an 'aristocrat'⁹⁴ and his art was the result of his aristocracy. In other words, Modigliani's works were not vulgar in any sense. Modigliani's women with long necks were a reaction to the academic schools. He did not aim to create vulgar works, but rather he re-elaborated the Italian Mannerist artists, such as Pontormo and Bronzino.

⁹³ Waldemar, "Modigliani".

⁹⁴ Vlaminck, *L'Art Vivant*, 1925.

In addition, Carco, who was against the *bourgeoisie*, found in Modigliani the perfect example of a ‘*bohème*’ artist. He perceived the upcoming interest for the *bohémien* in the French public. Therefore, he published many articles and reviews on Modigliani, which allowed readers to better understand Modigliani. In other words, Modigliani’s art was a response to a new demand by French society; Modigliani’s life was the prominent example a *bohème* and his art too.

Indeed, since the avant-gardes were opposed to the canons of the academies, the life of the *bohème* was the incarnation of this rebellion; Amedeo Modigliani is the performer of the 1900s French culture and more specifically of the “School of Paris”; Modigliani was also a testimonial of the Parisian *bohème* life, which influenced his art and detached him from the avant-gardes of the time. Further, he settled in Montparnasse and Montmartre, two Parisian areas which were known as the core of all the *bohème* artists.

In conclusion, another element to consider is that by the beginning of 1930, one fourth of the Parisian population was foreign, this percentage helped critics to recognize modernism as a way to appropriate the past along with new European art movements.⁹⁵ Hence, we can understand why in 1917 critics considered Modigliani unfavorably, while by the end of 1930 they began to appreciate his work as well as perceive him as a valid solution for modern art. Modigliani did not change his style, or his approach to art, but rather the context changed, and suddenly critics realized Modigliani could be a reconciliation of conventional and unconventional art.

At the same time, Italy also witnessed the rise of the necessity to define its national identity in art, and Fascism responded to this need. Consequently, Italian art critics were divided

⁹⁵ Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, 222.

into two sides. One side represented critics with pro-Fascist ideas, while the other side represented critics against Fascism.

The group of critics against Modigliani was mostly represented by Oppo, Saponi, and Lancellotti, who did not find in Modigliani an exaltation of Italian art's heritage, or of national identity.

Additionally, Amedeo Modigliani was born of Jewish parents;⁹⁶ this was not a favorable point for the Italian artist. Oppo, Saponi and Carco's negative comments were largely also the result of Fascist anti-Semitism, which disassociated Modigliani from Italy. In other words, religious and ethnic questions meddled with their opinions of the artist since, in his art, they argued, he retrieved the origins of the Jewish language. Oppo defined Modigliani's style as "anguished," Saponi followed claiming that Modigliani belonged to a death period, and Lancellotti defined Modigliani as a source of 'shame' for Italian art. Lancellotti and Saponi better personified the Italian national identity problem.

In other words, they shared the belief that Modigliani's works not only belonged to a bygone period, but also that it was a 'shame' for Italy. They only admired works able to transmit Italian national identity according to their Fascist definition and Modigliani was not part of this. First, because he moved to Paris. The abandonment of the "patria" was proof of Modigliani's decadence. For instance, Saponi, as mentioned previously, claimed: "Modigliani's time in Paris determined an art style that influenced his art till the end of his days".⁹⁷ In other words, he implicitly argued that Modigliani was beyond redemption. Second, because of Modigliani's use of Italian academic art subjects, which he rejected to condone African and Cycladic idols and

⁹⁶ Background information on Amedeo Modigliani. Accessed on November 9, 2019. Encyclopedia Treccani, (2019), <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/amedeo-modigliani/>.

⁹⁷ Saponi, *Arte Mondiale alla XIII Esposizione a Venezia*.

gods, along with elements of his Jewish culture perceived in his oval and elongated faces and almond eyes.

However, critics against Fascist ideas radically changed the Italian perception of Modigliani and the two Biennale exhibitions resumed Modigliani's Italian perception and delineated the great start of positive Modigliani's critical reception. Indeed, despite the presence in the art critics' field of Oppo, Saponi, and Lancellotti, there were two other Italian critics that counterbalanced the Italian situation, who at the end prevailed by creating 'Modigliani's critical fortune' namely, Scheiwiller and Vitali.

In particular, according to Paolo Rusconi, chair and professor of contemporary art history at the University of Milan, the change in Modigliani's critical reception may be due in part to the figure of Giovanni Scheiwiller, who in 1927 published in *Arte Moderna Italiana* his first edition of a monograph on Amedeo Modigliani. Scheiwiller is the first Italian writer to have published a book dedicated to Amedeo Modigliani. As a consequence, there are good reasons to argue that Scheiwiller's publication played a part in the Italian critical reception of Amedeo Modigliani. Rusconi pursues this line of thinking by claiming that Scheiwiller contributed to Modigliani's international success from 1925 to 1930, a weighty period in terms of political and cultural tensions.⁹⁸ A great example of the change in the way Italian critics viewed Modigliani after 1930 is the first Hoepli publication on Modigliani of 1921, followed by a second publication in 1930, and a third one in 1933. In particular, another indicator of Modigliani's success in 1921 is *Art book: Guide through the artistic literature of every epoch*

⁹⁸ "Modigliani nel lustro 1925-1930, periodo cruciale della sua affermazione in ambito internazionale." Paolo Rusconi, "Sulla Redazione dell'Amedeo Modigliani di Giovanni Scheiwiller e il suo contesto," *Studi di Memo fonte* no. 20 (2018): 116, https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/615830/1144839/RUSCONI_Memofonte2018.pdf.

*and every country*⁹⁹, which did not mention him at all. In this guidebook there are sections dedicated to artists such as Boccioni, Bonnard, Braque, Carrà, Corinth, de Chirico, Friesz, Goncharova, Gris, Klee, Kokoschka, Léger, Matisse, Meidner, Pascin, Pechstein, Picabia, Picasso, Rousseau, Schad, Schmidt-Rottluff, Severini, Soffici, and Vlaminck, but Modigliani's name was not even mentioned. By contrast, in 1930 the Hoepli guide entitled *From Esopo to Cocteau: Bibliographic Guide*¹⁰⁰ there is a section dedicated to Modigliani, among the artists that previously discussed in the 1921 guide. The 1930s gave the first signs of change in Modigliani's critical fortune in Italy. In 1933 Hoepli published *Italian Art from its origins to '900*¹⁰¹, in which the name of Modigliani figures many times. Following Rusconi, the rapid growth in publication mentioning Modigliani suggest burgeoning interest among Italian critics — whether this is due to a change in attitude toward the *bohémien* life, a leitmotif in early Modigliani criticism, or for other reasons.¹⁰²

Moreover, as mentioned in Rusconi's study, Scheiwiller is the major figure to represent the change in Italy. Indeed, he was the first Italian art critic to write a monograph dedicated entirely to Modigliani, and therefore he was the first that contributed to appreciate Modigliani with different eyes. It was a long process that started in 1927 and reached its peak in 1930 with the biennale exhibition. They produced a series of numerous writings, which are the core of the beginning of Modigliani's fortune.

In contrast to the other side of Italian critics, Scheiwiller claimed that Modigliani deliberately deformed his models and that his art was the end of a long process of academic

⁹⁹ Giovanni Scheiwiller, *Libri d'arte e di pregio artistico: Guida attraverso la letteratura artistica di tutte le epoche e di tutti i paesi* (Milano: Hoepli, 1921).

¹⁰⁰ Giovanni Scheiwiller, *Da Esopo A Cocteau. Guida Bibliografica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1930).

¹⁰¹ Giovanni Scheiwiller, *Arte Italiana dall' Origine al 900* (Milano: Hoepli, 1933).

¹⁰² La rapida crescita, in un decennio, delle pubblicazioni dedicate all' artista potrebbe delineare una conseguente accettazione, con un interesse per la vita Bohémien a cui Modigliani veniva spesso associato. Rusconi, "Sulla Redazione dell'Amedeo Modigliani," 117.

study as well as personal knowledge that let the artist find his own style. The ‘appropriation’ and the ‘application’ in a different context were two elements that critics against Modigliani did not understand. Modigliani explicitly created a style able to respond to his demand and the demands of the time.

In addition, according to Vitali, Italy must recognize Modigliani as part of Italian heritage and set him at the same level of other masters. Vitali tried to awaken Italy, which was not ready to recognize merits to Modigliani, but Modigliani was an Italian and his art had the right to be recognized as such.

Moreover, Modigliani’s journeys in Italy allowed him to enrich his academic knowledge, as well as to find his style, which he perfected in 1918-1919. For instance, when he traveled to Venice, he looked at Tintoretto and Titian’s use of colors; they used a tonal paint that was achieved with gradual passage of color. However, Modigliani favored pairing matt tones, such as greenish blues and browns. Modigliani studied the Old Masters, and he developed a modern style. Overall, Modigliani’s art was a study and appropriation of the past masters and periods applied in a new context and in a different need. However, he never abandoned his knowledge for the past, which is always visible in his paintings.

Scheiwiller’s and Vitali’s 1930 writings about Modigliani did not interpret him in terms of religion or politics. They glorified him for his talent. It was not important if he moved to Paris or if he abandoned his country. For Scheiwiller and Vitali, he was still an Italian artist, who deserved admiration. They both recognized his studies of the Italian Trecento and Renaissance old masters as well as his modernity.

Moreover, between classical rules and independence, Modigliani went through a transitional period, during which his works can be classified as impersonal because he achieved

his personal style in the last years of production, namely in 1918-1919. For instance, in this transitional time, he tried different techniques in painting as well as sculpture, which ended with a distinct form of expression. In the last period, he freed himself by synthesizing figures, but he still perceived his models as archetype of femininity and fecundity, which was a typical characteristic of 'classicism'.

In conclusion, both French and Italian critics, specifically Carco-Scheiwiller-Vitali, found in Modigliani a valid solution for the social and political situation. Carco mainly found in Modigliani and in his art the *bohème*. Scheiwiller and Vitali perceived Modigliani as an artist whose brilliant career had always deserved critical praise. Scheiwiller and Vitali began the long and positive series of critiques in Italy.

However, we cannot say the same for Modigliani's relationship with Italian primitivism, and the Renaissance, since he never abandoned Italian classical culture, but rather developed and adjusted it according to his canons.

Conclusion

Between 1917 and 1930 critics were clearly not ready to recognize Modigliani as part of either modern art or academic art. However, at the beginning of 1930 because of a change in society both in French and Italy, Modigliani's articulation of a modern classicism allowed critics to recognize Modigliani as a valid solution. Indeed, his conception of art allowed him to combine his Italian educational background with French avant-gardism into a coherent pictorial unity.

The great gap that stands between Modigliani's first exhibition in 1917 and the critical turning point in 1930 represents the major issue that one may find in studying Modigliani. This lacuna is still present in contemporary scholars of the 1920s, who only barely mention Modigliani, such as Christopher Green in his *Art in France 1900-1940*. Consequently, modern scholars have to deal with an enormous lacuna in both primary and secondary sources since Modigliani cannot be classified according to any specific art movement or school of thought. Modigliani's art is a combination of Italian Trecento, Renaissance, and avant-garde that allowed him to remain fiercely independent while answering the larger call for a modern classicism.

Illustrations



Fig. 1 Amedeo Modigliani. *Nu Couché* [*Reclining Nude, Head Resting on One Arm*]. 1918. Oil on canvas. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome. Source: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/nudo-sdraiato-amedeo-modigliani/IAGU9vywgexYvQ>.

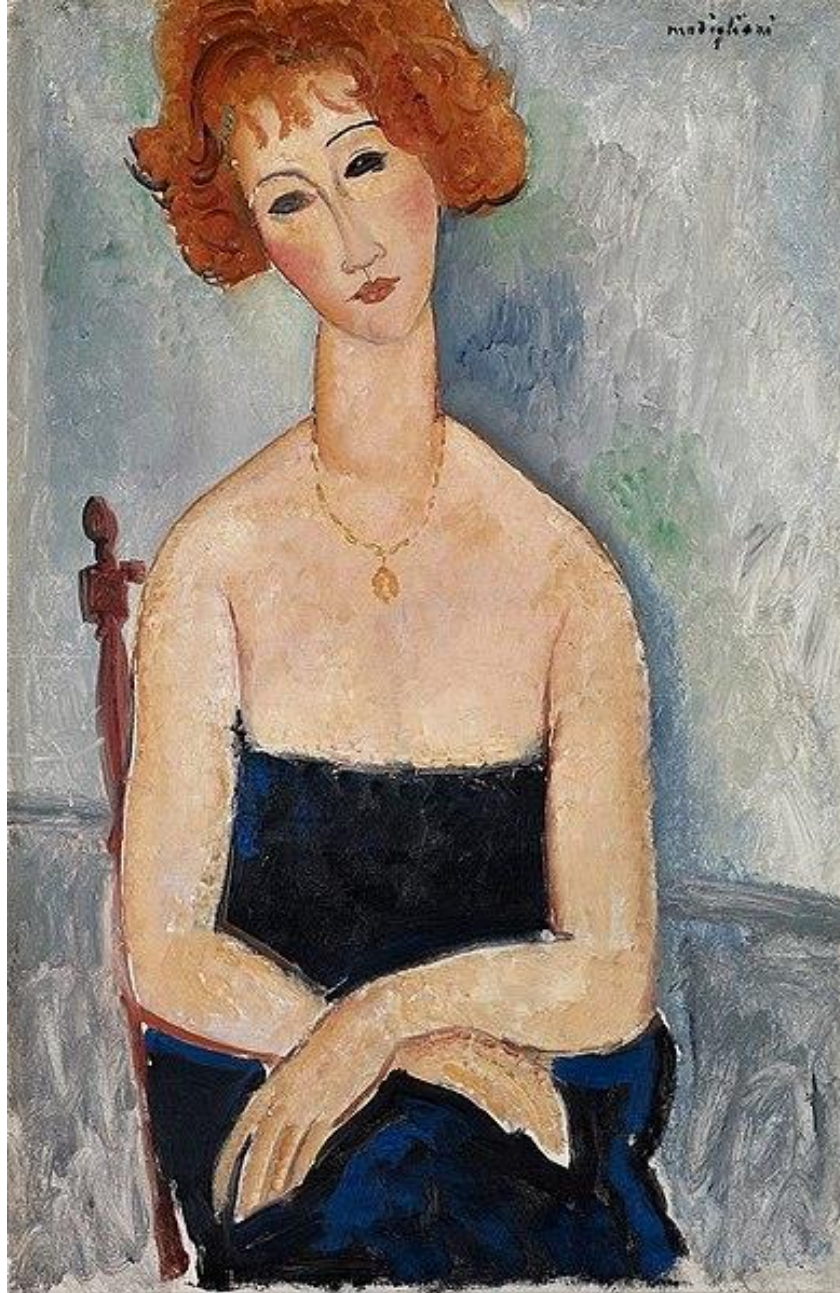


Fig. 2 Amedeo Modigliani, *La Rousse au Pendentif* [Woman with Red Hair and Pendant]. 1918. Oil on canvas. Alicia Koplowitz, Omega Capital Art Collection. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Rousse_au_Pendentif_by_Amedeo_Modigliani,_1918,_oil.jpg.

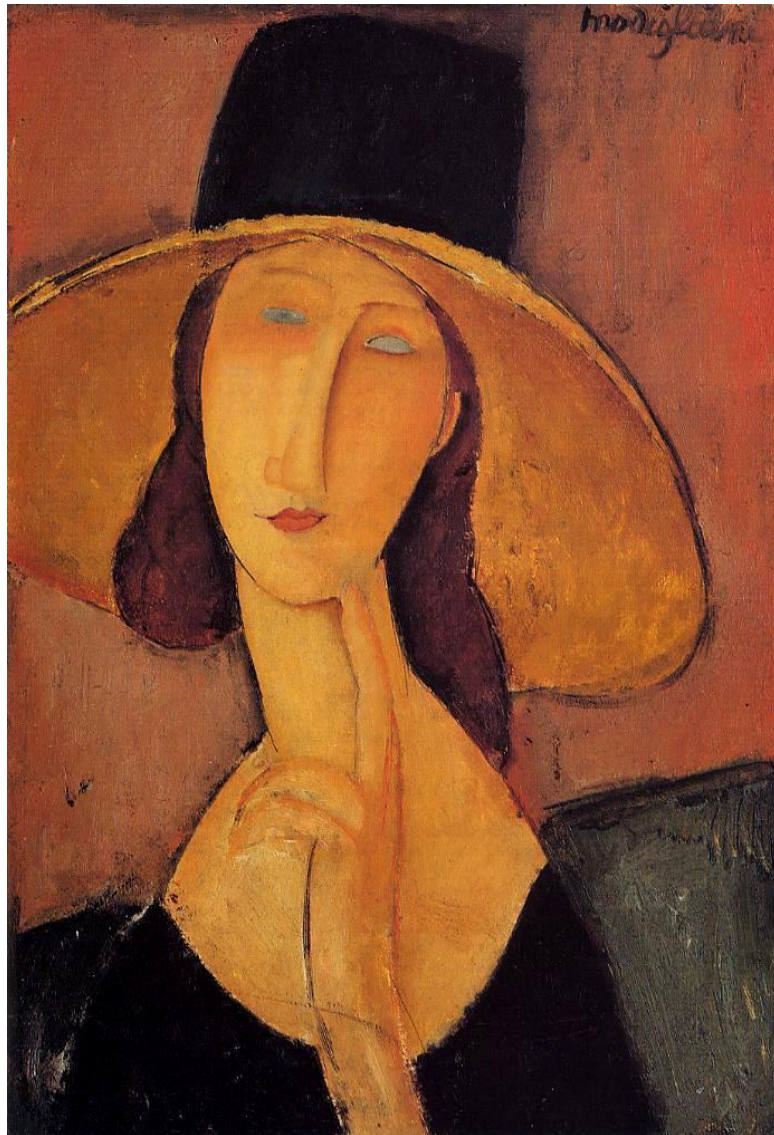


Fig. 3 Amedeo Modigliani, *Jeanne Hébuterne (Au Chapeau)*, [*Jeanne Hébuterne with Hat*], 1919. Oil on Canvas, Private collection.
Source: https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Modigliani_Amedeo_14.jpg.

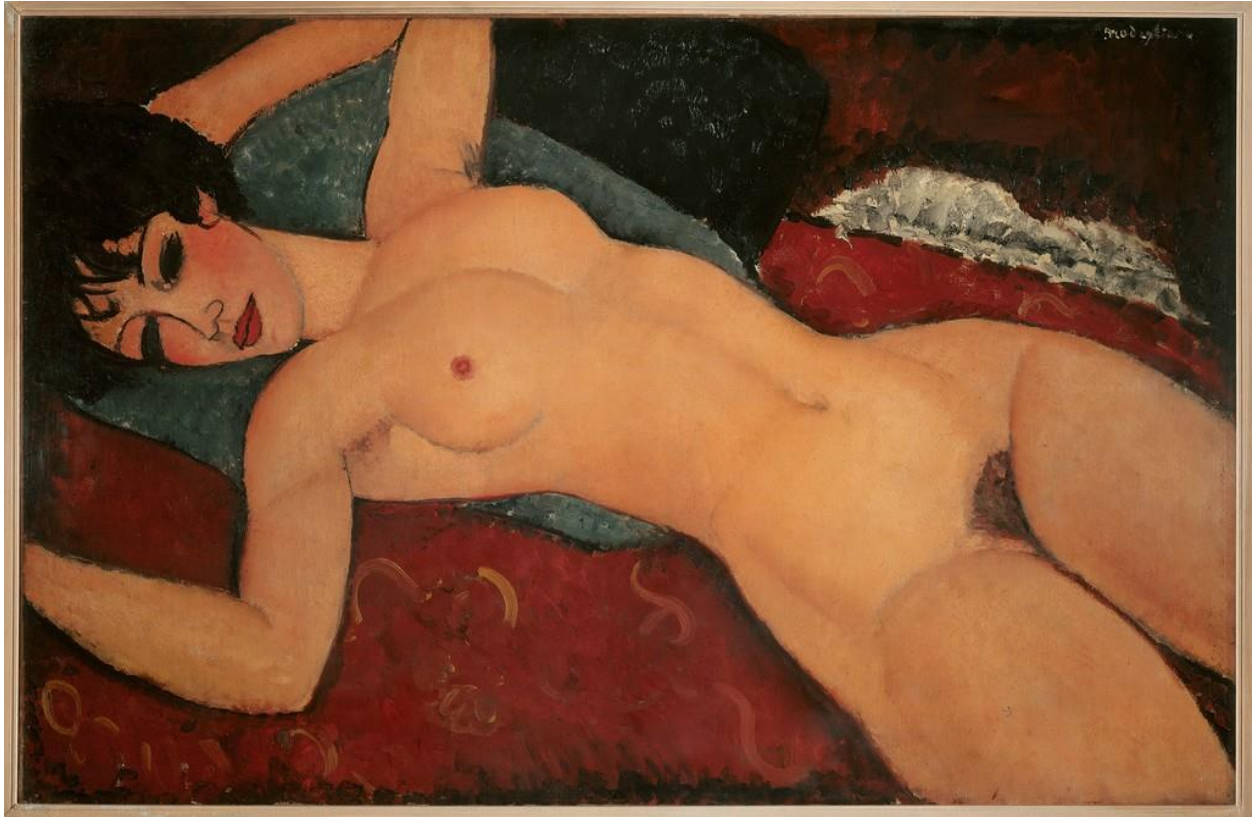


Fig. 4 Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu Couché*, [*Red Nude*], 1917. Oil on canvas, 1917. Mattioli Collection.

Source: https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039929315.



Fig. 5 Amedeo Modigliani, *Elvire au Col Blanc*, [Portrait of Elvira], 1919. Oil on Canvas.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Amedeo_Modigliani.



Fig. 6 Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)*,
[Lying Nude]. 1917. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Amedeo_Modigliani_014.jpg.



Fig 7. Amedeo Modigliani. *Tête [Woman's Head]*. 1912. Limestone. The Metropolitan Museum, New York. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/486837>

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